



The DAY OF DAYS

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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PROLOGUE.

"It breaks the speed limit to smitherens."

That's a candid opinion about this story. There may have been swifter tales, but not recently. It's an aeroplane of a yarn, moving so fast that you lose your breath while you follow it. But you don't need any breath, anyway, because you forget about respiration with your eyes on reading of this kind.

Every man has his day of days. Yours may have come and you may be swimming in the full tide of fortune. If so, read how P. Sybarite found his. If your own ship is still in the offing, you will enjoy learning how the little spunky red headed bookkeeper won a fortune and an heiress, foiled all his enemies and had some of the most amazing adventures ever penned—all in less time than it takes the hour hand to round the clock dial twice.

CHAPTER I.

The Dub.

"SMELL," P. Sybarite mused aloud. For an instant he was silent in depression. Then with extraordinary vehemence he continued, "Stupid stagnant-sepulchral-semipiternally-sticky smell!"

He paused for both breath and words, pondered with bended head, knitting his brows forbiddingly.

"Stench!" he perorated in a voice tremulous with emotion.

Even that comprehensive monosyllable was far from satisfactory.

"Oh, what's the use?" P. Sybarite despaired. His mother tongue itself seemed poverty stricken, his native wit inadequate.

Perched on the polished seat of a very tall stool, his slender legs frantically with his legs in apparently inedible intimacy, sharp elbows digging into the nickel and ink stained bed of a counting house desk, chin some six inches above the pages of a huge leather covered ledger, hair ruffled and fretful, mouth doleful, eyes disconsolate—he gloomed—

On this, the eve of his thirty-second birthday and likewise the tenth anniversary of his servitude, the appearance of P. Sybarite was elaborately normal—varying, as it did, but slightly from one year's end to the other.

His occupation had fitted his head and shoulders with a deceptive but none the less perennial stoop. His means had endowed him with a single outworn suit of ready made clothing.

The ruddy brown hair thatching his well modeled head, his sanguine coloring, friendly blue eyes and mobile lips suggesting Irish hue and grace, his hands which, though thin and clouded with smears of ink, were strong and graceful like the slender feet in his shabby shoes, carried out the suggestion with an added hint of gentle blood.

The place was the counting room in the warehouse of Messrs. Whigham & Wimper, hides and skins.

The warehouse—impregnable lair of the smell, from which it leered smug defiance at the sea sweet atmosphere of the lower city on a sunny April Saturday afternoon—occupied a walled in arch of the Brooklyn bridge, fronting on Frankfort street, New York.

Immersed in this retreat, P. Sybarite was very much shut away from all joy of living—alone with his \$15 job (which at present nothing pressed), with giant despair and its interlocutor ennui, and with that blinding, brutish, implacable smell of smells.

To all of these, abruptly and with ceremony, Mr. George Bross, shipping clerk, introduced himself, a brawny young man in shirt sleeves, wearing a "visionless" cap of soiled linen. In one hand he carried an envelope.

"Oh, you," said George, and checked to enjoy a rude giggle. Presently he controlled his mirth sufficiently to permit of unctuous enunciation of the following cryptic exclamation:

"Oh, you, Perceval!"

P. Sybarite turned pale.

HOW YOU CAN GAIN FLESH AND STRENGTH



Those who are weak and run down should begin at this time of the year to make every effort to regain flesh and strength. Physicians prescribe as the best tonic and body builder, Father John's Medicine because it is composed of pure and wholesome nourishing food elements, which strengthen and build up the body. It is free from dangerous drugs or stimulants. Get a bottle today. It will make you strong.—(Adv.)

"You little rascal!" continued George, brandishing the envelope. "You're a sly one, you are, always signin' your name 'P. Sybarite' and pretendin' your maiden moniker was 'Perceval'. But now we know you. Take off them whiskers—Perceval!"

A really wise mind reader would have called a policeman then and there, for mayhem was the least of the crimes contemplated by P. Sybarite.

"If that letter's for me," he said quietly, "give it here, please."

"Special dilly-ry—jus' come," announced George. "Oh, you Perceval—Enquire!"

The letter was torn rudely from his grasp.

"Here!" he cried resentfully. "Where's your manners—Perceval!"

Dumb with impotent rage, P. Sybarite climbed back on his stool, while George sat down at his desk and, with a leer, watched the bookkeeper carefully slit the envelope and withdraw its inclosures.

Ignoring him, P. Sybarite ran his eye through the few lines of notably careless feminine handwriting:

My Dear Perceval—Mother and I had planned to take some friends to the theater tonight and bought a box for the Knickerbocker several weeks ago, but now we have decided to go to Mrs. Hadley-Owen's post Lenten masquerade ball instead, and as none of our friends can use the tickets I thought possibly you might like them. They say Otis Skinner is wonderful. Of course you may not care to sit in a stage box without a dress suit, but perhaps you won't mind. If you do maybe you know somebody else who could go properly dressed. Your affectionate cousin,

MAE ALYS.

Drawing to him one of the Whigham & Wimper letterheads, P. Sybarite dipped a pen, considered briefly, and wrote rapidly and freely in a minute hand:

My Dear Mae Alys—Every man has his price. You know mine. Pocketing false pride, I accept your bounty with all the gratitude and humility becoming in a poor relation. And if arrested for appearing in the box without evening clothes I promise solemnly to brazen it out, pretend that I bought the tickets myself or stole them and keep the newspapers ignorant of our kinship. Fear not, trust me and enjoy the masquerade as much as I mean to enjoy the play.

And if you would do me the greatest of favors, should you ever again find an excuse to write me on any matter, please address me by the initials of my ridiculous first name only. It is, of course, impossible for me to live down the deep damnation of having been born a Sybarite, but the indulgence of my friends can keep the newspapers ignorant of our kinship. Fear not, trust me and enjoy the masquerade as much as I mean to enjoy the play.

With thanks renewed and profound, I remain, all things considered, remotely yours,

P. SYBARITE.

This he sealed and addressed in a stamped envelope; then he slined round on his stool to blink pensively at Mr. Bross.

That gentleman having some time since despaired of any response to his persistent baiting was now preoccupied with a hand mirror and endeavoring to erase the smudge of marking ink from his face with a handkerchief.

"It's no use, George," observed P. Sybarite presently. "Try soap and water. I know it's painful, but believe me, it's the only way. I'm going to shut up shop in just five minutes, and if you don't want to show yourself on the street looking like a difference of opinion between a bull calf and a fountain pen."

"Gotcha," interrupted George, rising and putting away his handkerchief and mirror. "I'll drown myself if you say so. Anything's better'n letting you talk me to death."

"One thing more."

Splashing rigorously at the stationary wash stand, George looked gloomily over his shoulder and in sepulchral accents uttered the one word:

"Shoot!"

"How would you like to go to the theater tonight?"

"I'd like it so hard," George replied. "That I'm already dated up for an evening of intellect's enjoyment. Me and Sammy Holt's goin' round to Minner's Eight avenue and bust up the show."

"I mean a regular show, at a Broadway house."

"Quit your kiddin'," countered Mr. Bross indignantly. "Come along! I got an engagement to walk home and save a nickel, and so're you."

"Wait a minute," insisted P. Sybarite, without moving. "I'm in earnest about this. I offer you a seat in a stage box at the Knickerbocker theater tonight to see Otis Skinner in 'Kismet', with Miss Prim, Miss Lessing and myself—on one condition."

"Go to it."

"You must promise me to quit calling me Perceval, here or any place else, today and forever! And never tell anybody, either."

"And what if I keep on?"

"Then I'll make up my theater party without you—and break your neck in the bargain," said P. Sybarite.

"You?" George laughed derisively. "You break my neck? Can the comedy, beau. Why, I could eat you alive, Perceval!"

"We're going to settle this question before you leave this warehouse. I won't be called Perceval by you or any other pink eared cross between Balaam's ass and a laughing hyena."

Mr. Bross gaped with resentment.

"You won't, eh?" he said stridently. "I like to know what you're going to do to stop me, Perceval!"

P. Sybarite stepped quickly toward him, and George, with a growl, threw

out his hands in a manner based upon a somewhat hazy conception of the form of self defense. Then—George Bross sat up on the dusty, graying floor, batted his eyes, ruefully rubbed the back of his head and marveled at the reverberations inside it.

"Say," he ejaculated, with fervid feeling, "did you do that to me?"

"I did," returned P. Sybarite curtly. "Want me to prove it?"

"Plenty, thanks," returned the shipping clerk morosely as he picked himself up and dusted off his clothing. "Gee, you got a wallop like the kick of a mule, Per!"

"Cut that!"

"P. S. I mean," George amended hastily. "Why didn't you ever tell me you was the Big Smoke's sparrin' partner?"

"I'm not and never was, and furthermore I didn't hit you," replied P. Sybarite. "All I did was to let you fall over my foot and bump your head on the floor. Better accept my offer and be friends."

"Never call you Per!"

"Don't say it!"

"Oh, all right—all right," George agreed plaintively. "And if I promise I'm in on that theater party?"

"That's my offer."

"It's hard," George sighed regretfully. "But whatever you say goes. I'll keep your secret."

"Good!" P. Sybarite extended one of his small, delicately modeled hands. "Shake," said he, smiling wistfully.

P. Sybarite and Mr. Bross, with at least every outward semblance of complete amity were presently swinging shoulder to shoulder up the sunny side of lower Broadway.

"Lis'n," George interjected of a sudden. "I wanna know where you picked up all that classy footwork?"

"Oh," returned P. S. carelessly. "Used to come a bit with the fellow when I was at—ah—when I was young'er."

"Huh! You mean when you was at college?"

"Please yourself," said P. Sybarite wearily.

"Well, you was at college once, wasn't you?"

"I was," P. S. admitted with reluctance, "but I never graduated. When I was twenty-one I had to quit to go to work for Whigham & Wimper."

"Gwan!" commented the other. "They ain't been in business twenty years."

"I'm only thirty-one."

"More news for Sweeney. You'll never see forty again. Your people had money, didn't they, once?"

"I've been told so, but if true it only goes to prove there's nothing in the theory of heredity."

"I gotcha," announced Bross, upon prolonged and painful analysis.

"How?" asked P. Sybarite, who had fallen to thinking of other matters.

"I mean, I just dropped to your high sign to mind my own business. All right, P. S. Far be it from me to want pry into your past."

He was a man of his word, was George Bross; not for anything would he have gone back on his promise to keep secret that afternoon's titillating discovery; likewise he was a covetous soul, loath to forfeit the promised treat, but one way or another, that day's humiliation must be balanced.

How to compass this desire, frankly puzzled him. It was cowardly to contemplate knocking the block off P. Sybarite, the disparity of their statures forbade; moreover, George entertained a vexatious suspicion that P. Sybarite's explanation on his recent downfall had not been altogether disingenuous.

Suddenly it was borne in upon the shipping clerk that in the probable arrangement of the proposed party he would be expected to dance attendance upon Miss Violet Prim, leaving P. Sybarite free to devote himself to Miss Lessing. And he scowled darkly.

"P. S. got his nerve with him," he protested privately, "to cop out the one pippin in the house all for his lonely. It's a wonder he wouldn't slip her a chance to enjoy herself with summon her own age."

"Not," he admitted ruefully, "that I'd find it healthy to pull any rough stuff with Vi lookin' on."

Then he made an end to envy for the time being, and turned his attention to more pressing concerns. And when at Thirty-eighth street, the latter made an excuse to part with George. Instead of going home in his company, the shipping clerk was too thoroughly disgusted to question the subterfuge.

Turning west, he was presently prompted by that arch comedian Doty (disguised as a thrifter to drop into Clancy's for a shelf of beer.

Now, in Clancy's George found a crumpled copy of an evening paper at most about on the high tide of the dregs drenched bar. Rescuing the sheet, he smoothed it out and con-

templated a two column reproduction in a course half tone of a photograph entitled "Marian Blessington."

Slowly the confusion and confounding of P. Sybarite took shape and matured.

He left Clancy's presently, stepping high, with a mind elate, forecasting victory.

Meanwhile, P. Sybarite walked slowly on Broadway a little way, then doubled on his trail, going softly until a swift and stealthy survey westward from the corner of Thirty-eighth street assured him that George was not skulking to spy upon him. Thus reassured, he mended his pace and held briskly on toward the shopping district.

His hour was fleeting. In twenty minutes it would be 6 o'clock. At 6 sharp Blessington's would close its doors. Distressed, he hurried on, crossed Thirty-fourth street, alined himself courageously for the wide entrance of the department store, battled manfully through the retreating army of feminine shoppers and gained the ladies' glove counter with a scant fifteen minutes to spare. He found himself before a fair young woman, with a pleasant manner.

She recognized him, with surprise, but none the less with a friendly smile.

"Why, Mr. Sybarite?"

"In his hearing her voice was rarest music. He gulped, stammered, "Miss Lessing!" and was stricken dumb by realization of his effrontery.

"Can I do anything for you?"

He breathed in panic, "Gloves!"

"For a lady, Mr. Sybarite?"

He nodded as expressively as any automaton.

"What kind?"

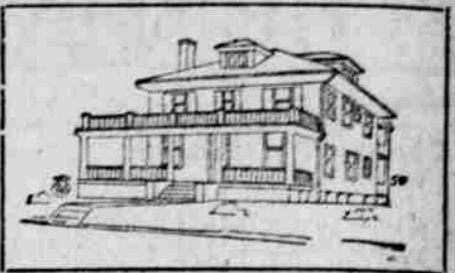
"I—I don't know."

"For day or evening wear?"

He wagged a dismal head. "I don't know."



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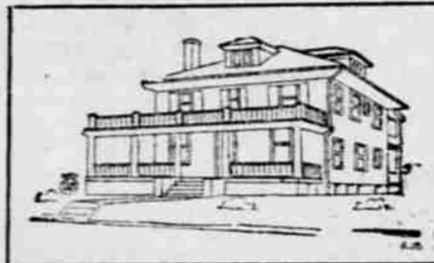


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Amusement touched her eyes and lips so charmingly that he thought of the sea at dawn, rimples by the morning breeze, gay with the laughter of young sunlight.

"Oh, I see. You wish to make a present. Evening gloves are always acceptable. Does she go often to the theater?"

"I—don't know."

"Well—is she old or young?"

"I—ab—couldn't say."

"Mr. Sybarite!" said the young woman, with decision.

He fixed an apprehensive gaze to hers, which inclined to disapproval, if with reservations.

"Yes, Miss Lessing?"

"Do you really want to buy gloves?"

"No-o."

"Then what under the sun do you want?"

He noticed suddenly that, however impatient her tone, her eyes were still kindly. Eyes of luminous hazel brown they were, wide open and clear beneath dark and delicate brows; eyes that assented oddly with her hair of pale, dull gold, rendering her prettiness both individual and distinctive.

Somehow he found himself more at ease.

"Please," he begged humbly, "show me some gloves—any kind—it doesn't matter—and pretend you believe I want to buy 'em. I don't really. I—I only want—a—word with you before you go home."

If it were impertinence the girl elected quickly not to resent it. She turned to the shelves behind her, took down a box or two and opened them for his inspection.

"These are very nice," she suggested quietly.

"I think so too." He grinned uneasily. "What I want to say is—will you be my guest at the theater tonight?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," she said, replacing the gloves.

"With Miss Prim and George Bross," he amended hastily. "Somebody—a friend—sent me a box for 'Kismet'. I thought possibly you might care to go. It—it would give me great pleasure."

Miss Lessing held up another pair of gloves.

"These are \$3.50," she said absently. "Why did you come here to ask me?"

"I—I was afraid you might make some other engagement for the evening."

He couldn't have served his cause more badly than by uttering just that transparent evasion. In a thought she understood; at their boarding house he could have found no ready opportunity to ask her save in the presence of others, and he was desperately apprehensive lest she refuse.

After all, he had reason to be; they were only table acquaintances of a few weeks' standing. It was most presumptuous of him to dream that she would accept.

On the other hand, he was (she considered gravely) a decent, manly little body.

"It's so good of you to think of me," she said.

"You mean that you—you will

come?" he cried, transported.

"I shall be very glad."

"That's—that's awfully good of you," he said huskily. "Now, do please find some way to get rid of me."

Smiling quietly, the girl recovered the glove boxes.

"I'm afraid we haven't what you want in stock," she said in a voice not loud, but clear enough to carry to the ears of her inquisitive coloritors.

"We're expecting a fresh shipment in next week—if you could stop in then."

"Thank you very much," said P. Sybarite with uncalled for emotion.

He backed away awkwardly, spoiled the effect altogether by lifting his hat, wheeled and broke for the doors and won his way through them a single instant before they closed.

(To Be Continued Next Wednesday.)

Cats and Man.

No subject that Dr. Weir Mitchell studied, either scientific or social, is more curious than the one he described in a little known paper entitled "Of Allorophobia and the Power to Be Conscious of the Cat as Near, When Unseen and Unheard." In this paper Dr. Mitchell declares that there

are persons who have been able to distinguish the presence of a cat by its smell, but cannot any longer do so and yet who retain ability to detect unseen cats.

"It is likely," he says, "that the cat emanations may affect the nervous system through the nasal membrane, although unrecognized as odors. Why these emanations should, if plainly perceived as due to cats, cause certain symptoms in those who dread cats is readily understood."

"The ultimate cause of unreasonable terror of cats I cannot explain."—Century.

Long Winded.

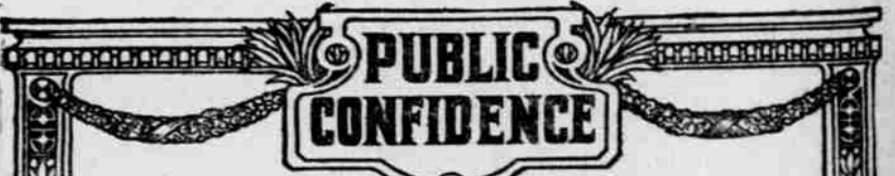
"Don't you enjoy hearing your wife discuss questions of the hour?"

"When Henrietta discusses anything," replied Mr. Meekton, "it is not a question of the hour. It is a question of several hours."—Washington Star.

Too Cheap.

"Major pitcher brings \$55 in sale," read Mrs. Fan.

"Huh!" sneered Mr. Fan. "He can't be much of a player."—Buffalo Express.



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